

The Classical Weekly

VOLUME XXVII, No. 2

MONDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1933

WHOLE No. 719

GREEK AND ROMAN WEATHER LORE OF THE SEA

(Continued from page 6)

CONTINUANCE INTO HISTORIC TIMES OF EPIC IDEAS ABOUT THE WEATHER

The nautical meteorology of the great classical epics is quite naturally much concerned with deities, since they are able to send favorable breezes and to stay terrible storms. During the great days of Greece and Rome the gods maintained their position as masters of the elements. Nor would the heroes of the Iliad and the Odyssey have been compelled to readjust their ideas about divine control of the weather had they been brought to life again in Athens or in Rome. The transition to Christian meteorology was quite as easy, for converts had to do little more than substitute the names of the Christian deity and the saints for those of Zeus and the other gods and the weather magicians. Near the end of this paper I shall give a few examples of divine control of the weather as recorded in the Church Fathers (see the text in connection with notes 340-349, below).

PRAYERS FOR GOOD WEATHER AND A PROSPEROUS VOYAGE

Cicero¹²⁴ holds that, if one regards clouds as being controlled by the gods, tempests, which have been consecrated by the rites of the Roman people, must be so regarded. Hence rains, clouds, squalls, and storms in general must be considered under the power of the gods.

Since it was believed that the gods controlled the elements¹²⁵, prayers for favorable breezes were a natural consequence¹²⁶. Seamen felt gratitude when such breezes sprang up¹²⁷. One traveler prayed that the favorable weather which Zeus had sent in answer to his entreaties upon the sea might continue to waft him on till he reached the final haven in the voyage of life¹²⁸. Even to the dead one might wish a *bon voyage*¹²⁹.

Wind and wave were a dangerous combination. Prayers were raised for salvation from them as well as for their aid. We still have a lengthy invocation which an unknown traveler directed to Ocean for a happy voyage¹³⁰. Poseidon, too, might be called upon to guide a bark safely homeward over the surging sea¹³¹. Alcione offered incense to all the powers in general and

made prayers to Juno to direct her husband safely over the seas¹³². Before killing himself on the shores of Africa Cato Uticensis prayed for a prosperous voyage for his men¹³³.

A better known entreaty, however, is that which Horace made to a ship to carry Vergil safely amid the perils of the sea¹³⁴. Upon it Wordsworth modeled a few lines called On the Departure of Sir Walter Scott from Abbotsford, for Naples:

Be true,
Ye winds of ocean, and the midland sea,
Wafting your Charge to soft Parthenope!

An interesting sailor's song called 'To the Rhodian Winds' is contained in a late third-century papyrus¹³⁵:

I commanded the Rhodian winds and the seaward parts when I wished to sail; when I wished to remain there, I said to the seaward parts that the sea should not be smitten. Make the ocean obedient to seafarers! Suddenly a whole tempest arises. Shut off the winds, and, night, grant that the waters be smooth.

OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES FOR GOOD WEATHER AND SAFETY AT SEA

We have seen that in Homeric days sacrifices were made to the waters. Such sacrifices were offered through all antiquity. When one of Alexander's commanders, Nearchus, was about to put out from India and to face the terrors of an unknown sea, he sacrificed bulls to Poseidon, poured a libation upon the sacrifice, and threw the golden cup and mixing bowls into the deep as thank-offerings, at the same time praying that the expedition might fare well¹³⁶.

The Spartan Cleomenes, before embarking his army at Thyrea to sail to the region of Tiryns and Nauplia¹³⁷, sacrificed a bull to the sea.

At Tenos there were a temple and a statue of Poseidon¹³⁸, and a festival was held there in his honor¹³⁹.

On account of the storms the ancient ships sailing to Delos were often obliged to stop at Tinos to make sacrifices for their abatement, just as in later days sea captains made supplications to the Virgin at the church of the "Stavro," on the west coast of the island, for the same purpose¹⁴⁰.

¹²⁴Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11.577-581.

¹²⁵Plutarch, *Moralia* 781 D.

¹²⁶Carmina 1.3. Other references to the propempticon are Callimachus, *Fragment* 114; Theocritus 7.52; Statius, *Silvae* 3.2. For a propempticon to an enemy, Mevius, see Horace, *Epodes* 10. Professor Knapp calls my attention to an interesting note by Professor G. L. Hendrickson, *Horace's Propempticon to Virgil* (= *Carmina* 1.3), *The Classical Journal* 3 (1908), 100-104.

¹²⁷The translation is by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 11, No. 1383, page 237 (*Egypt Exploration Fund*, London, 1915).

¹²⁸Arrian 6.19.5.

¹²⁹Herodotus 6.76. We are told by Stephanus of Byzantium, s. v. *Βοῦβωρος*, that, when Helenus was about to make a sacrificial offering of a cow before setting out from Troy, the intended victim avoided the blow and escaped through the midst of the sea.

¹³⁰Tacitus, *Annales* 3.63.

¹³¹Strabo 10.5.11.

¹³²See e. g. Pindar, *Pythia* 1.65-68. ¹³³Greek Anthology 9.9. ¹³⁴H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Selectae Latinae*, Volume II, Part II, No. 8031 (Berlin, Weidmann, 1906).

¹³⁵*Incerti Votum Ad Oceanum Pro Felici Navigatione*. See N. E. Lemaire, *Poetae Latini Minores*, 3.320-323 (Paris, 1824-1826).

¹³⁶Athenaeus 209 E.

¹³⁷George Horton, *Home of Nymphs and Vampires: The Isles of Greece*, 15 (Indianapolis, The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1929). See also *ibidem*, 37.

To the Delian Brizo, a goddess who revealed the future through dreams, women brought bowls full of all sorts of good things (except fish). They prayed to her concerning everything, but especially in behalf of the safety of the boats¹⁴¹. Cakes were offered to Zeus Ourios¹⁴². On the island of Syros offerings were made to Asclepius for protection from shipwreck¹⁴³.

As Cicero tells us¹⁴⁴, it was the custom of the Romans before embarking to offer a victim to the waves. Examples may readily be found in Roman history as well as in the legends of the Aeneid.

It was natural for Vergil to weave the incident of Palinurus¹⁴⁵ into his poem, for he was familiar with many examples of such sacrifice in connection with historical events. Before departing from Sicily on his fateful expedition to Africa in 204 B. C. Scipio prayed to the gods and the goddesses for success by land and sea, and he made sacrifice. A favoring wind quickly carried the fleet out of sight of land. At mid-day, however, a cloud encompassed it, so that with difficulty the vessels avoided striking one another. The cloud continued throughout the night, but the next morning was clear and the wind freshened. Ere long Scipio saw the land that was to give him fame and another name¹⁴⁶.

On setting out from Puteoli in 36 B. C. to seek vengeance against Caesar's enemies, Octavian made sacrifices and libations to the propitious winds, to Savior Neptune, and to Waveless Ocean, that they might aid him, but storms injured some ships and wrecked others¹⁴⁷. On learning of these calamities his foe, Sextus Pompeius, putting on a dark blue robe, offered sacrifice to the sea and to Neptune and persuaded himself that Neptune was on his side¹⁴⁸.

Some coins struck during the principate of Commodus show on the reverse sides a fleet putting to sea VOTIS FELICIBUS, while a bull is being offered to the waves by two figures, one of which represents Commodus¹⁴⁹. Perhaps the fleet is sailing to Africa for grain¹⁵⁰.

It would seem that no nation had a firmer belief in the efficacy of sacrifice to the waves than had the Saxons. We read that on setting out from the continent after a raid they abandoned every tenth captive to the agony of a watery grave¹⁵¹.

Even to-day offerings to the waters are not un-

known, as is attested by an article by Heinrich Hauser, *By Sail Around Cape Horn*¹⁵²:

... Sacrifices must be paid to the sea. In our struggle around Cape Horn, which lasted nineteen days, the captain threw his live dog overboard. Another man cast off a shirt. These sacrifices must be thrown into the water on the windward side to propitiate the sea. Refuse is always thrown to leeward and if one threw some sacrificial offering over the leeward side the sea might look upon it as refuse and be offended.

We have already seen, as in the case of the Greek fleet at Aulis, that sacrifices were made to the gods to secure favorable winds¹⁵³, but that the sacrifices might be made to the winds themselves. At the departure of the Argonauts Ancaeus offered a bull to the *rector aquarum*, to the Zephyrs, and to Glaucus, and a heifer to Thetis¹⁵⁴. In Titane, a town in Sicyonia, a priest made sacrifices to the winds on one night in every year¹⁵⁵.

PRAYERS AND VOWS AT SEA

As might be expected, efforts to win the favor of the gods continued at sea. A good example may be found in the Greek Anthology¹⁵⁶:

When with the blasts of the Libyan wind, the fierce Sirocco, the sea grew dark and belched up the sand from her profoundest depths, when every mast had fallen into the hollow of the deep and the lost merchant ship was drifting to Hades, Lysistratus called on the gods who help mariners, and they, for the sake of the temple ministrant alone, lulled the savage waves.

During the voyage of the Argonauts Orpheus besought the Samothracian gods to cause the winds to cease, whereupon Glaucus, the old man of the sea, appeared and attended the ship for two days¹⁵⁷.

While Herostratus, of Naucratis, was bringing from Cyprus to his home a small statue of Aphrodite, a great storm burst upon the ship as it was nearing Egypt, so that the mariners could not tell where they were. In this emergency everyone hastened to the statue of the goddess and implored it for safety, whereupon the sun shone again and revealed the harbor of Naucratis. On landing, Herostratus sacrificed in the Temple of Aphrodite and dedicated the statue to it¹⁵⁸.

Other gods, of course, were invoked at sea¹⁵⁹. During one dangerous storm when Christians were aboard a threatened ship, the pagans called upon Jupiter, Mercury, Minerva, and Venus¹⁶⁰. As we shall see, Castor and Pollux were the special friends of sailors and appeals were often made to them¹⁶¹.

St. Ambrose's brother once made vows *apud sanctum martyrem Laurentium*. To them his safe return from a voyage was ascribed¹⁶².

¹⁴¹Athenaeus 335 B.

¹⁴²Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum 2.975, No. 3797 (see note 46, above).

¹⁴³*Ἀθήναιος* 4.20, No. 33. This is quoted by W. H. D. Rouse, *Greek Votive Offerings*, 229 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1902). (Ten volumes of the periodical *Ἀθήναιος* were published, 1872-1881).

¹⁴⁴*De Natura Deorum* 3.51.

¹⁴⁵See the text connected with note 84, above.

¹⁴⁶Livy 29.27.1-8. See also Appian, *Roman History* 8.13.75.

¹⁴⁷Appian, *Bellum Civile* 5.98-99.

¹⁴⁸*Ibidem*, 5.100. In the expiatory offerings of the Roman fleets the gods were invoked to bring evil upon the victims instead of upon the fleet. See *ibidem*, 5.96. <For a recent discussion of the incident referred to in the text see M. Hadas, *Sextus Pompey*, 114 (Columbia University Press, 1930). For a review of this monograph, by Professor Laistner, see *THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY* 25.110-111. C. K. >.

¹⁴⁹H. Cohen, *Description Historique des Monnaies Prappées sous l'Empire Romain*, 3.357 (Paris, Rollin et Feuardent, 1883). See also J. Eckhel, *Doctrina Numorum Veterum*, 7.129 (1828).

¹⁵⁰See Lampridius, *Commodus* 17.7 *Classen Africanam instituit quae subsidio esset si forte Alexandrina frumenta cessasset*.

¹⁵¹Sidonius 8.6.15.

¹⁵²*The Living Age*, 339 (1930), 170-171.

¹⁵³Lucian, *Vera Historia* 2.2, makes mention of sacrifices to Poseidon during a calm that lasted three days.

¹⁵⁴Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 1.188-191.

¹⁵⁵Pausanias 2.12.1. Many examples of offerings to the winds have been collected by Paul Stengel in his article, *Die Opfer der Hellenen an die Winde*, *Hermes* 16 (1881), 346-350, and in his book, *Opferbräuche der Griechen*, 146-153 (Leipzig, Teubner, 1910). See also *THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY* 18.155 B.

¹⁵⁶9.290. I give W. R. Paton's translation, in *The Loeb Classical Library*.

¹⁵⁷Diodorus 4.48.6. ¹⁵⁸Athenaeus 675 F-676 B.

¹⁵⁹For instance, Zeus (Aratus, *Phaenomena* 426) and Isis (Tibullus 1.3.28). On Isis as a deity of seamen see also Gruppe, 1572, note 3 (see note 2, above).

¹⁶⁰See the text connected with note 351, below.

¹⁶¹See the next section of this paper.

¹⁶²St. Ambrose, *De Excussu Fratris Sui Satyri* 1.17 (Migne, P. L., 16.1295-1296).

An interesting example of a vow made at sea is to be found in the Greek Anthology¹⁶²:

Diogenes, when he saw his yard-arm broken by the blast of Boreas, as the tempest lashed the Carpathian sea by night, vowed, if he escaped death, to hang me, this little cloak, in thy holy porch, Boeotian Cabirus, in memory of that stormy voyage; and I pray thee keep poverty too from his door.

The best example I have found of sacrifice at sea is the one already given from the Homeric Hymns¹⁶³.

CASTOR AND POLLUX

Although there were many gods to whom those who were in distress at sea offered prayers and made vows, Castor and Pollux became the chief deities of seamen in danger. The ancient attitude toward these gods is well represented by Macaulay in his *Lays of Ancient Rome*¹⁶⁴:

Safe comes the ship to haven,
Through billows and through gales,
If once the Great Twin Brethren
Sit shining on the sails.

Such ideas date back to remote antiquity, for in the Homeric Hymns¹⁶⁵ the Dioscuri are called

... deliverers of men on earth and of swift-going ships when stormy gales rage over the ruthless sea. Then the shipmen call upon the sons of great Zeus with vows of white lambs, going to the forepart of the prow¹⁶⁶; but the strong wind and the waves of the sea lay the ship under water, until suddenly these two are seen darting through the air on tawny wings. Forthwith they allay the blasts of the cruel winds and still the waves upon the surface of the white sea: fair signs are they and deliverance from toil. And when the shipmen see them they are glad and have rest from their pain and labor.

Throughout all antiquity seamen prayed to Castor and Pollux as saviors both of sailors and of their ships¹⁶⁷. Himerius urged those who crossed the sea to let the Dioscuri pilot their fortunes¹⁶⁸. St. Paul departed from Melita in a ship of Alexandria "whose sign was Castor and Pollux"¹⁶⁹. These gods were invoked to be near Helena in her home-coming¹⁷⁰. Theocritus¹⁷¹ calls them saviors of men and also of ships which, disregarding the omens of stars rising and setting in the heavens, run into terrible gales.

In 359 A. D. there was danger of a famine in the city of Rome because violent contrary winds and an unusually tempestuous sea had prevented grain-laden ships from reaching Ostia. In this extremity ill feeling arose against the Prefect, Tertullus, but, while he was engaged in sacrificing at Ostia in the Temple of Castor

and Pollux, the sea became calm, the wind changed to a gentle *auster*, and the ships reached the harbor¹⁷².

ST. ELMO'S FIRE

Castor and Pollux were associated rather early with one of the most picturesque and fascinating displays of nature, St. Elmo's fire, the blue flame that flits here and there about ships, and dances on the points of spears¹⁷³. The attitude of ancient sailors toward this phenomenon, commonly called 'stars', is well set forth by Seneca¹⁷⁴:

... In violent storms at sea there sometimes appear, as it were, stars settling on the sails. The sailors who are in jeopardy then suppose they are being aided by the power of Castor and Pollux. They have really ground for better hope in this appearance, because it makes plain that the storm is breaking, and the wind falling. Otherwise the fires would flit about without settling. . . .

Stars upon ships were early esteemed signs of good luck. After the Battle of Salamis the Aeginetans dedicated at Delphi three golden stars upon a mast, but Herodotus¹⁷⁵, who records this information, makes no mention of Castor and Pollux in connection with the stars. Tradition, however, records a far earlier association of these gods with these strange lights¹⁷⁶. Amid a storm during the voyage of the Argonauts Orpheus sacrificed and prayed to the gods of Samothrace for salvation. Thereupon a sudden calm ensued and two stars settled upon the heads of Castor and Pollux, members of the expedition. Ever since, tradition said, it had been the custom during the perils of storms at sea to call upon the gods of Samothrace¹⁷⁷ and to regard as Castor and Pollux the stars of deliverance that appear in answer to such calls.

One might fittingly, therefore, invoke the Dioscuri for safe conduct at sea, as did Horace¹⁷⁸ in behalf of his beloved Vergil:

Sic te diva potens Cypri,
sic fratres Helenae, lucida sidera,
ventorumque regat pater,
obstrictis aliis praeter Iapyga,
navis, quae tibi creditum
debes Vergilium finibus Atticis,
reddas incolumem, precor,
et serves animae dimidium meae.

There was a story in antiquity that, as Lysander was putting out from the harbor of Lampsacus to attack the Athenians at Aegospotami, the Dioscuri appeared as stars on either side of his ship¹⁷⁹. Maximus of Tyre

¹⁷²Ammianus Marcellinus 19.10.1-4. Ammianus, however, attributed this good fortune to the deity who had watched over the growth of Rome.

¹⁷³See, for example, Pliny 2.101. A remarkable example is to be found in Gregory of Tours, *De Miraculis S. Martini* 1.10 (Migne, P. L., 71.923). An excellent collection of both ancient and modern references to St. Elmo's fire has been made by A. S. Pease, in his note on Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.77 (M. Tulli Ciceronis *De Divinatione*, University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, VI and VIII [1920, 1923]).

¹⁷⁴Naturales Quaestiones 1.1.11-12 (I give John Clarke's translation [London, Macmillan, 1910]). See also Horace, *Carmina* 1.12.27-32, 4.8.31-32. ¹⁷⁵132.

¹⁷⁶Diodorus Siculus 4.43.1-2. Compare Valerius Flaccus 1.568-573.

¹⁷⁷Compare Diodorus Siculus 4.48.6-7.

¹⁷⁸Carmina 1.3.1-8. Compare Statius, *Silvae* 3.2.8-12 *Proferte benigna sidera et antennae gemino considite cornu, Oebalii fratres; vobis pontusque polusque luceat; Iliacae longe nimboosa sororis astra fugate, precor, totoque excludite caelo*. See also Ovid, *Fasti* 5.720; Lucian, *Charidemus* 3; *Prognosticorum Reliquiae* 1.10-11 (Breysig, 41; see note 2, above); Hesychius, under *Διόσκουροι*.

¹⁷⁹Plutarch, *Lysander* 12.1.

¹⁶²165.245. ¹⁶³See the text connected with note 54, above.

¹⁶⁴The Battle of Lake Regillus 765-768.

¹⁶⁵33 (I give H. G. Evelyn-White's translation, in The Loeb Classical Library).

¹⁶⁶The translation 'prow' is a strange inadvertence. The Greek text reads *πρόμυρ*, but the reading *πρόμυρ* has been suggested.

¹⁶⁷See Euripides, *Orestes* 1636-1637, *Electra* 1240-1241; Isocrates 10.61; Plato, *Euthydemus* 293; Pausanias 2.1.9; Plutarch, *Moralia* 426 C (compare 1103 D); Arrian, *Epictetus* 2.18.29; Lucian, *De Mercede Conductus* 1, *Dialogi Deorum* 26.2; Strabo 1.3.2; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 9.86; Catullus 68.63-66; Horace, *Carmina* 3.20, 63-64; Propertius 1.17.18; Hyginus, *Astronomica* 2.22. See also K. Jaisle, *Die Dioskuren als Retter zur See bei Griechen und Römern und ihr Fortleben in Christlichen Legenden* (Tübingen, J. J. Heckenhauer, 1907).

¹⁶⁸Oraciones 1.10. ¹⁶⁹Acts 28.11.

¹⁷⁰Euripides, *Helena* 1495-1505.

¹⁷¹22.6-9. Compare 22.16-18.

says that he himself had seen the stars of these deities put on the right course a boat buffeted by storm¹⁸⁰.

Antiquity was not unanimous, however, in regarding St. Elmo's fire as favorable. When the 'stars' appeared singly, they were threatening; if they settled on the hull, they burned it¹⁸¹. A solitary light was generally called 'Helena'. Its epiphany portended a frightful fate for sailors¹⁸² and ships, but it was put to flight on the appearance of Castor and Pollux¹⁸³.

Some of these ideas survive and have been made use of by Charles Reade in his story, *The Cloister and the Hearth*¹⁸⁴. He puts these words into the mouth of the captain of a doomed ship:

"Friends," said he, "last night when all was fair, too fair, alas! there came a globe of fire close to the ship. When a pair of them come it is good luck, and nought can drown her that voyage. We mariners call these fiery globes Castor and Pollux. But if Castor come without Pollux or Pollux without Castor, she is doomed. Therefore, like good Christians, prepare to die."

Some of the ancients said that the constellation of the Gemini (Castorum Signa) created dangers at sea¹⁸⁵. In his work on the interpretation of dreams Artemidorus¹⁸⁶ considered the appearance of Castor and Pollux a sign of storm. Isidorus¹⁸⁷ held that a change of weather for the worse was to be expected when during sailing by night the water on the oars and the rudders emitted sparks.

There are other classical references to Castor and Pollux as guardians of those at sea, and to St. Elmo's fire¹⁸⁸. They may readily be found in the standard handbooks.

In modern times the appearance of St. Elmo's fire has likewise inspired both confidence and fear. One of the most interesting passages is to be found in Washington Irving's description¹⁸⁹ of the approach of Columbus to the New World on his second voyage:

Towards the latter part of October they had in the night a gust of heavy rain, accompanied by the severe thunder and lightning of the tropics. It lasted for four hours, and they < = the crews > considered themselves in much peril, until they beheld several of those lambent flames playing about the tops of the masts, and gliding along the rigging, which have always been the objects of superstitious fancies among sailors. Fernando Columbus makes remarks¹⁹⁰ on them, strongly characteristic of the age in which he lived. "On the same Saturday, in the night, was seen St. Elmo with seven lighted

tapers, at the topmast: there was much rain and great thunder; I mean to say, that those lights were seen, which mariners affirm to be the body of St. Elmo, on beholding which they chant litanies and orisons, holding it for certain, that in the tempest in which he appears, no one is in danger. Be that as it may, I leave the matter to them; but if we may believe Pliny, similar lights have sometimes appeared to the Roman mariners during tempests at sea, which they said were Castor and Pollux, of which likewise Seneca makes mention."

Another interesting description of this strange appearance is to be found in Dampier's *Voyages*¹⁹¹:

After four a clock the Thunder and the Rain abated, and then we saw a Corpus Sant at our Main-top-mast head, on the very top of the truck of the Spindle. This sight rejoiced our Men exceedingly; for the height of the Storm is commonly over when the Corpus Sant is seen aloft; but when they are seen lying on the Deck, it is generally accounted a bad sign.

Captain Dampier was told¹⁹² that, when the Spaniards see these fires,

... they presently go to Prayers, and bless themselves for the happy sight. I have heard some ignorant Seamen discoursing how they have seen them creep, or as they say travel in the Scuppers, telling many dismal Stories that hapned at such times: but I did never see any one stir out of the place where it was first fixt, except upon Deck, where every Sea washeth it about: neither did I ever see any but when we have had hard Rain as well as Wind; and therefore do believe it is some Jelly: but enough of this.

The frolicsome and capricious nature of the phenomenon is well pictured at the end of the next quotation, from Hakluyt's *Voyages*¹⁹³:

I do remember that in the great and boisterous storms of this fowle weather, in the night, there came upon the toppe of our maine yarde and maine maste, a certaine little light, much like unto the light of a little candle, which the Spaniards called the Cuerpo-Santo¹⁹⁴, and said it was St. Elmo, whom they take to bee the advocate of sailers This light continued aboard our ship about three houres, flying from maste to maste, and from top to top; and sometimes it would be in two or three places at once¹⁹⁵.

Magellan's men, too, welcomed the sight of this peculiar flame¹⁹⁶:

During these great storms, they said that St. Elmo appeared at the topmast with a lighted candle, and sometimes with two, upon which the people shed tears of joy, receiving great consolation, and saluted him according to the custom of mariners. He remained visible for a quarter of an hour, and then disappeared, with a great flash of lighting, which blinded the people.

¹⁸⁰9.7 (H. Hobein's edition; Leipzig, Teubner, 1910). A good example of such guidance is to be found in Lucian, *Navigium Seu Vota* 8-9.

¹⁸¹Pliny 2.101.

¹⁸²Statius, *Thebais* 7.791-793 Non aliter caeco nocturni turbine Cori scit peritura ratis, cum iam damnata sororis igne Therapnaei fugerunt carbasia fratres. See also Solinus 1.37 . . . sidus Helenae perniciosissimum navigantibus, and Sosibios, as quoted by the scholiast on Euripides, *Orestes* 1637. Compare Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 688-689 *Ἑλένα* . . . *Ἰδρυα*.

¹⁸³Pliny 2.101; Statius, *Silvae* 3.2.11-12; Lydus, *De Ostentis* 5.

¹⁸⁴Chapter 57. ¹⁸⁵Fulgentius 2.16. ¹⁸⁶2.37.

¹⁸⁷*De Natura Rerum* 38.1.

¹⁸⁸Important references to St. Elmo's fire are as follows: Dares-Berg-Saglio, under Dioscuri, 2.263; Pauly-Wissowa, under Dioskuren, 5.1094-1097; Roscher, under Dioskuren, 1.1163-1164. See also A.B. Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion*, 1.763-764, 771-775 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1914); J. G. Frazer, *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, 1.49-50 (London, Macmillan, 1917); *The Fasti of Ovid*, 4.121-122 (London, Macmillan, 1929); Th. Henri Martin, *La Foudre et le Feu Saint-Elme dans l'Antiquité*, *Revue Archéologique, Nouvelle Série*, 13 (1866), 168-179; Th. Henri Martin, *La Foudre, l'Électricité et le Magnétisme chez les Anciens*, 222-231, *et passim* (Paris, Didier, 1866).

¹⁸⁹The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus, Book 6, Chapter 1, near the end.

¹⁹⁰*Historia del Almirante*, Chapter 45.

¹⁹¹This work, by Captain William Dampier, has a very long title, "Dampier's Voyages, Consisting of a New Voyage Round the World . . ." It was edited by John Masefield (London, E. Grant Richards, 1906). For the passage given in the text see 409-410.

¹⁹²*Ibidem*, 410.

¹⁹³As quoted by T. P. Thielton-Dyer, *The Folk Lore of Shakespeare*, 80 (London, Griffin and Farran, 1884).

¹⁹⁴For many interesting modern names of this phenomenon in various languages see the periodical entitled *Mélusine* 2 (1884-1885), 112-113 (the full title of this periodical is *Mélusine, Recueil de Mythologie, Littérature Populaire, Traditions, et Usages* . . .).

¹⁹⁵The last sentence reminds one of a passage which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Ariel in *The Tempest* 1.2.196-203:

I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flamed amazement: sometimes, I'd divide,
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join. Jove's lightning, the precursors
O' the dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not

¹⁹⁶The source of this quotation is given in note 189, above. In Irving's work it is a footnote. Irving gives his source as "Herrera, *decad ii. lib. iv. cap. 10*". See text connected with note 189, above.

As was true in antiquity, the appearance of St. Elmo's fire is to-day not always a happy augury.

This light, the Greek sailor thinks, portends an immediate onset of malevolent aerial powers, whom he straightway tries to scare away by every means in his power, by invocation of saints and incantation against the demons, by firing of guns, and, best of all, by driving a black-handled knife . . . into the mast. For he no longer discriminates as did the Greek mariner of old; then the appearance of two such flames was greeted with gladness as a manifestation of the Dioscuri, the saviours from storm and tempest, and evil was portended only if there appeared a single flame, the token of Helena, who wrecked as surely as her twin brothers guarded; now the phenomenon in any form bodes naught but ill¹⁹⁷.

The phenomenon is anything but kindly in William Falconer's poem, *The Shipwreck*¹⁹⁸:

High on the masts, with pale and livid rays,
Amid the gloom portentous meteors blaze.

Some additional lore of St. Elmo's fire is to be found in R. H. Dana's book, *Two Years before the Mast*¹⁹⁹. He mentions it in a description of a thunder storm "in the latitude of the West Indies" while the brig *Pilgrim* was "just in the track of the tremendous hurricane of 1830, which swept the North Atlantic, destroying almost everything before it":

. . . When we got down <from the mast> we found all hands looking aloft, and there, directly over where we had been standing, upon the main top-gallant-mast-head, was a ball of light, which the sailors name a corposant (*corpus sancti*), and which the mate had called out to us to look at. They were all watching it carefully, for sailors have a notion that if the corposant rises in the rigging, it is a sign of fair weather, but if it comes lower down, there will be a storm. Unfortunately, as an omen, it came down, and showed itself on the top-gallant yard-arm. We were off the yard in good season, for it is held a fatal sign to have the pale light of the corposant thrown upon one's face . . . In a few minutes it disappeared, and showed itself again on the fore top-gallant yard; and after playing about for some time, disappeared again; when the man on the forecastle pointed to it upon the flying-jib-boom-end.

An English writer who over fifty years ago made some comments on the weather of Sicily associated St. Elmo's fire with definite winds²⁰⁰:

. . . Those from the east round to southerly are heavy, and loaded with an unwholesome mist, often accompanied with heavy rain, thunder, and lightning, during which the luminous meteor, called by seamen *campasant*, (a corruption of *Corpo Santo*) is sometimes seen, and hailed with similar ideas to those which inspired the ancients on the appearance of their *Castor* and *Pollux*.

Victor Hugo²⁰¹ says that

. . . In certain tempests, which characterize the equinoxes and the return to equilibrium of the prolific

¹⁹⁷J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, 286-287 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1910). See also G. F. Abbott, *Macedonian Folklore*, 241 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1903).

¹⁹⁸Canto 3, Section 4.

¹⁹⁹Chapter 34 (near end). A not less interesting passage about 'corpusants' may be found in Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, Chapter 119. Darwin mentions this phenomenon in *The Voyage of the Beagle*, Chapter 3.

²⁰⁰Wm. H. Smyth, *Memoir Descriptive of the Resources, Inhabitants, and Hydrography, of Sicily and Its Islands*, 4-5 (London, John Murray, 1874).

²⁰¹The passage occurs in volume 2, page 25 of an anonymous translation published by Little, Brown, and Company, Boston, 1804. The passage may be found in other editions by consulting Part II, Book 1, Chapter 5.

power of Nature, vessels breasting the foam seem to give out a kind of fire, phosphoric lights chase each other along the rigging, so close sometimes to the sailors at their work that the latter stretch forth their hands and try to catch as they fly these birds of flame.

The belief that St. Elmo's fire portends storm is not without some justification²⁰²:

. . . They are indeed nothing but electric manifestations due to the highly charged condition, incident to thunderstorms, of the passing clouds and upper air, a condition that causes tall objects whether on land or sea to flare with a continuous coronal or brush discharge. Clearly, then, in the experience of the mariner, they are most common on the warmer oceans (actually more frequent still on mountain peaks) and since they indicate the prevalence of thunderstorm we may well agree that the following conclusion is in accord with experience and not, as some would tell us, merely prompted by superstition:

"Last night I saw St. Elmo's stars,
With their glimmering lanterns all at play
On the tops of the masts and the tips of the spars,
And I knew we should have foul weather today"²⁰³.

(To be continued)

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

EUGENE S. MCCARTNEY

Thought and Letters in Western Europe A. D. 500 to 900. By M. L. W. Laistner. New York: Lincoln MacVeagh, The Dial Press (1931). Pp. ix + 354. \$4.00.

In my reviews of Professor Eleanor S. Duckett's book, *Latin Writers of the Fifth Century* (*THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY* 26.29-30), and of the book by Messrs. F. A. Wright and T. A. Sinclair, *History of Later Latin Literature from the Middle of the Fourth Century to the End of the Seventeenth* (*THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY* 26.21-23), I referred to Professor Laistner's book, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe A. D. 500 to 900*, and quoted from it. It was with great pleasure that I set out to review the volume.

The period which Professor Laistner undertook "... within the moderate compass of a single volume. . ." (Preface, v) "to describe and estimate . . ." (*ibidem*) has been, from the point of view of completeness and unity of treatment, sorely neglected by English scholars. Students, therefore, of this period and of medieval literature in general owe a great debt to Professor Laistner for giving us in this book a uniquely methodical treatment of the history of thought and letters in those formative, and, therefore, most momentous and eventful centuries which followed the downfall of the Western Roman Empire. Momentous and eventful they were because from the chaos which followed the breakdown of the Empire there emerged a new civilization and a new order, fundamental in the formation of modern Europe.

Stormy centuries of such formative and transitional character, during which much salvaging had to be done to rescue the learning of the past, could hardly foster and

²⁰²W. J. Humphreys, *Weather Proverbs and Paradoxes*, 69-70 (Baltimore, Williams and Wilkins Company, 1923). An interesting chapter called *The Fires of St. Elmo* is to be found in a book by C. P. Talman, *The Realm of the Air* (Indianapolis, The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1931).

²⁰³These are the words of the *Padrone* in Longfellow, *The Golden Legend*, near the end of Part V.

inspire intellectual life of the highest type. Literature, therefore, of the creative type we ought not to expect to find in those centuries. But writings even of the most unattractive type can be a mirror in which vital problems and the handling of them are reflected. To disregard such literature because it is unattractive would amount to building a house without a foundation, for a study of that very uneven and erratic literature which was produced during those centuries of chaos is fundamental for the understanding of the forces which shaped the destiny of the Middle Ages.

Of course, the task of the historian of the literature of such a period is not an enviable task. That task involves, for example, the evaluation of the "different areas of culture . . ." (Preface, v) and the picturing of the contrast between those areas and "the alternations of brilliance and obscurity that characterized them . . ." (Preface, v).

Professor Laistner does not lose sight of the fact that the period with which he deals is fundamental in character. Those who are familiar with his previous contributions on classical and medieval subjects know how well he is equipped for the difficult task involved in the writing of the book under review. I can say at the outset, without hesitation, that in this book he displays scholarly qualities to great advantage. He does not plunge *in medias res*. He realizes that to begin with the sixth century would leave the student without a background, historical or literary. He therefore devotes Part I of his book¹ to a brief outline of the history and the literature of Western Europe in the fourth and the fifth centuries. The barbarian invasions, the rôle of the Church, the influence of pagan learning and education upon Christian schools, and a brief sketch of the Christian literature of these centuries are among the topics concisely but deftly discussed in Part I. Of especial merit is Chapter II. In Chapter III only the most noteworthy writers and poets are dealt with. Among these are Cyprian, Augustine, Jerome, Salvian, Paulinus of Nola, Prudentius, and Ambrose.

With Part II the subject of the book proper begins.

¹The contents of the volume are as follows: Part I, Introductory: The Western Empire in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries (1-58); I, The Empire and the Church, (a) The Empire and its Invaders (1-9), (b) The Church (10-16), II, Pagan Education and the Christian Attitude, (a) Pagan Education and Letters (17-26), (b) The Christian Attitude to Pagan Learning (26-33), III, Christian Literature During the Fourth and Fifth Centuries (34-58); Part II, From the Beginning of the Sixth to the Middle of the Eighth Century (59-146); IV, From Boethius to Isidore, (a) Italy (59-83), (b) North Africa, Spain, and Gaul (83-103), V, Irish and English Scholars and Missionaries to the Death of Bede (104-120), VI, The Western European Continent, c. 637-751, and the Missionary Labours of Boniface (130-146); Part III, The Carolingian Age (147-325); VII, The Revival of Education and Learning Under Charlemagne (147-162), VIII, Carolingian Education and the Seven Liberal Arts (163-179), IX, Libraries and *Scriptoria* (180-190), X, The Study of Greek (191-201), XI, The Literature of the Carolingian Age, (a) The Study of Classical Latin Literature (202-213), (b) History and Biography (213-227), (c) Hagiography (227-233), (d) Geography (233-234), XII, The Literature of the Carolingian Age: Theology, (a) Controversial and Dogmatic Writings (235-246), (b) Exegesis; Pastoral and Liturgical Writings (246-260), XIII, The Literature of the Carolingian Age, (a) Political Ideas (261-267), (b) Philosophy (267-273), XIV, The Literature of the Carolingian Age: Poetry (274-302), XV, Vernacular Literature, (a) Poetry (303-316), (b) Prose (316-325); Appendix of Translations <Of the Poetic Passages quoted in the Book> (327-335); Select Bibliography (337-341); General Index (343-351); Index of Patristic and Mediaeval Writers Cited in the Text (352); Index of Modern Authors Cited in the Notes (353-354).—There is also a Map, which shows The Frankish Empire and England. C. K. >.

Since so many national and cultural areas had to be considered, Professor Laistner wisely chose the regional method of treatment. In Chapter IV, he surveys first the literary output of Africa, Spain, and Gaul (83-104). Notwithstanding the intellectual decline that prevailed generally throughout the West, Italy produced some men who were destined to exert a profound influence. Boethius is one of them. Brief though the account of Boethius is (59-64), it gives a clear and well rounded picture of the man and his influence, with emphasis on the importance of his attempt to preserve and to transmit the philosophy of the past. The argument advanced for Boethius's authorship of the *De Fide Catholica* (61) is very instructive².

After discussing Boethius, Professor Laistner passes to a discussion of Benedict of Nursia (64-68), Cassiodorus (68-74), and Gregory the Great (74-82). The Rule of St. Benedict is briefly analyzed (65-66), and its aim is well interpreted (67). The rôle, aims, and contribution of Cassiodorus, especially the services rendered by him in connection with the preservation of the writers of the past, are well set forth. The same statement may be made of the discussion of Gregory the Great. In the treatment of his personality, his attitude toward secular literature (80), and his influence on Church organization (82) Professor Laistner is preeminently successful. Before passing to North Africa, Spain, and Gaul Professor Laistner adds (82-83) a brief outline of the condition of secular literature in Milan and Ravenna.

In Africa intellectual life was still lingering, but in the sixth century Africa hardly produced any writer worthy of mention, except the poet Corippus, the author of the *Johannis* (84-85). The same is true of Spain, which, like Africa, in days gone by could boast of many literary *lumina*. But even now, notwithstanding unfavorable conditions, Spain produced that polymath, Isidorus of Seville (89-94), whose activities are largely responsible for saving and preserving the legacy of the past. The treatment of Isidorus is impartial. Professor Laistner rightly avoids measuring Isidorus's intellectual achievement by modern standards. He sees and tries to make the reader see under what conditions and for what fundamental purposes this medieval scholar wrote his *Etymologiae*. As in the case of Cassiodorus, Gregory, and other writers, Professor Laistner sees Isidorus in the light of his contribution, the only way fairly to evaluate an author. I quote (92-93):

It is easy to sneer at the *Etymologiae* and to point to single items in the book which strike a modern reader as puerile. But it was assuredly no small achievement to put together a compendious encyclopedia of the arts and sciences from many sources, at a time when the larger works of earlier authors on different branches of human knowledge were accessible in few places, and when few men, in any case, would have been capable of studying them . . .

On page 93 we read the following statement:

... A great deal has been written in recent years on

²The bibliographical references in this book are unusually rich. I miss, however, the mention of an excellent article by Professor J. Bidez, *Boèce et Porphyre* (Revue Belge de Philosophie et d'Histoire 2 [1923], 189-201), all the more because Professor Laistner mentions (60, note 2) an earlier article by Bidez which deals with Porphyrius and Boethius.

Isidore's plan and method of composition and on his sources; yet it must be admitted that some uncertainty still exists both about the one and the other . . .

In this connection I may add another recent contribution to the 'Quellenkunde' of Isidorus, an able dissertation by Dr. Arthur von Fragstein, *Isidor von Sevilla und die Sogenannten Germanicusscholien* (Breslau, 1931)¹.

Of the writers of Gaul two receive a good deal of space—the poet Fortunatus (96–98), and Gregory of Tours (98–103). I quote Professor Laistner's estimate of Gregory (102):

... Thus he gave to the Middle Ages some of the best examples of a type of literature at once edifying and readable, because it satisfied the common human love for a good story and at the same time took men's thoughts away for a spell from the violence and sordid reality of their mundane existence . . .

While, for example, in Spain, the continuity of classical traditions is well traceable, this tradition was destroyed in England, and was practically non-existent in Ireland. Yet, despite this fact, it was exactly these countries that supplied an intellectual stimulus which gave a new lease to the intellectual life in Europe of the seventh century. With no vernacular background for their Latin studies—a background which their continental confreres possessed—the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons reached, in Bede, for example, an almost classical level in their mastery of Latin. They had a knowledge of Greek too (191), which in continental Europe was well nigh dead. Their scholarship, going hand in hand with a unique missionary zeal and a strict monastic discipline, left an indelible imprint on European culture. Irish monks crossed to the continent, to be followed by their Anglo-Saxon disciples.

Chapter V deals ably with this great intellectual mission of the Irish and the English. Again Professor Laistner is careful to give a short historical introduction. Gildas, the *Hisperica Famina* (104–105), and St. Patrick (106) are briefly discussed. More thoroughly treated is the work of Columban and of Adamnan (108–115). The significance of the West-Saxon scholar-poet Aldhelm (118–121) is well set forth. The most outstanding account here, however, is that of the Venerable Bede (121–129). Historians of literature are in the habit of emphasizing Bede's historical works, for which he is so well known, but are inclined to neglect other contributions by Bede, of equal importance (e. g. his exegetical works on the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament). Professor Laistner tries to remedy this situation by concentrating both upon the method and upon the content (123) of these other works. Brief though his treatment is (123–127), it gives us another aspect of Bede, that of a religious teacher and theologian. Professor Laistner concludes thus (129): "... As a theological commentator he attained to a position of authority inferior only to that of the four fathers of the Latin Church".

In Chapter VI Professor Laistner gives a sketch of the writers of Spain, among them Julian, "... no un-

worthy successor to Isidore of Seville..." (132). He then passes to Italy (132–138), which, between the death of Gregory the Great and the Age of Charlemagne, produced no man that can be compared to Isidorus, Aldhelm, and Bede (132, 134). Interesting remarks are made on the influence of Bobbio, Monte Cassino, and their respective *scriptoria* (135–138). Then comes an account of the literary output of Gaul (138–141). Gaul produced that moronic freak, Virgilius Maro (Grammaticus Tolosanus), a worthy specimen of an age which, more than any other, perhaps, brought about the barbarization of Latin. The account of Virgilius is preeminently sane. Professor Laistner rightly refuses to take him seriously. The comparison of his *Epitomae* in point of strangeness with the *Hisperica Famina* (139) is well done, and the explanation (139) that "... Virgilius's works are a skit or parody on grammatical treatises" is both sound and cogent. This chapter ends with an excellent exposition of the life and the work of Boniface, and of the conversion of Germany (142–146).

Part III, which is *quasi libri cumulus*, deals with the Carolingian Age. A glance at the Table of Contents given in note 1, above, will show that, before passing to the study of the literature of this age, Professor Laistner discusses forces that go to make literature. Both the classicist and the student of the history of education will find Chapters VII–X impeccable in point of scholarship, suggestiveness, and soundness of presentation. The account of Alcuin and the Palace School (150–152) is excellent. The chapter on the Libraries and the *Scriptoria* is perhaps the best in the book. Of great value to the classicist is Chapter X. It is based not on a repetition of opinions of others (191), but on a methodical study of the evidence furnished by authors and manuscripts of the Carolingian Age (200). Professor Laistner divides authors familiar with Greek into two classes, (a) those who had the ability correctly to understand a Greek author, theological or secular, and (b) those whose knowledge was limited to the alphabet and phrases or words from both Testaments. He criticizes, rightly, certain scholars for their failure to distinguish between these classes (191). The result is that he divests of their reputation men like Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus (192–193), and Notker (195), who paraded as Greek scholars, and proves conclusively that their knowledge of Greek was superficial. The only satisfactory evidence for the "active" study of Greek the author finds in the district west of the Rhine, in some centers of Irish learning (196). The most outstanding of these Greek scholars was John Scotus (197). From the point of view of method, so far as assembling and evaluating scattered pieces of evidence are concerned, this chapter is a masterpiece.

Chapters XI–XIV are devoted exclusively to the study of the Literature of the Carolingian Age. This study, while concise, is detailed in every respect. Chapters XI–XIII deal with all shades of prose writers. In Chapter XII the treatment is subdivided into a discussion of Controversial and Dogmatic Writings (235–246) and "Exegesis; Pastoral and Liturgical Writings"

¹Reference may be made to a paper entitled *Some Latin Writers of Spain*, by Charles C. Mierow, *THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY* 23:157–160. The paper deals with Isidore, Iuvencus, Orosius, Priscillianus, and Prudentius. C. K.

(246-260). Chapter XIII gives an adequate treatment of Political Ideas (261-267) and Philosophy (267-273). This outline alone shows the wealth of material embodied in these chapters. Again of great interest to the classicist is the section on the study of classical literature, in which there is a splendid account of that forerunner of the Renaissance, Servatus Lupus (205-211)⁴. Despite conciseness the same finesse of treatment appears in the account of historical literature, especially of Paul the Deacon, Nithard, and Einhard (219-227). Fine and sympathetic treatment falls also to the lot of the unhappy Gottschalk (243-246), and John Scotus (267-273). In dealing with all these authors Professor Laistner never loses sight of the fact that they must be judged not by modern standards, but only in the light of the intellectual conditions and the spiritual needs of the period in which they wrote (252).

Poetry of this period is reserved for Chapter XIV (274-302). The inclusion of generous quotations in Latin and their translation into English (in a separate Appendix: 327-335) are praiseworthy features of the book. Since some authors of this period wrote both prose and poetry, many names, some of them mentioned above, occur here again. So Paul the Deacon and Alcuin (279-280) and Gottschalk are discussed here (287-289). The treatment of poets, however, is limited to the leading poets, with typical examples from the rest (279). The question of the Sequence and its association with Notker is excellently stated (298-299):

⁴In footnote 2 on page 206 it should have been stated that the first volume of Lupus's Correspondence has appeared (Paris, Champion, 1927).

... Let it be granted also that Notker's influence on the development of liturgical poetry, at least in countries east of the Rhine, was fundamental, even if its precise scope can no longer be defined. Nevertheless, apart from this, it is difficult to see with what justification some modern writers of authority have assigned to him a leading place amongst Carolingian poets ... his poetical achievement has been much exaggerated

The book closes with Chapter XV (303-325), which deals with Vernacular Literature. While Professor Laistner says (Preface, VI) that he added it after much hesitation, since he was there venturing into an unfamiliar field, the fact, of which he is well aware, that "No study of the intellectual life of Western Europe to the end of the ninth century would be complete without some allusion to the remains of vernacular literature ..." (303), makes this apologetic hesitation unnecessary. The chapter adds much to the value of the book.

Professor Laistner's book is a real contribution, which for years to come will remain an indispensable guide in this field. The wide range of learning, methodical presentation, independent and sane judgment, the ability to grasp the work of writers as an entity, freedom from conjectural dogmatism are some of the features of this excellent book. To this may be added careful documentation, a Select Bibliography (337-341), and good Indices (343-354). Both Professor Laistner and American scholarship can take pride in this book.

HUNTER COLLEGE,
NEW YORK CITY

JACOB HAMMER